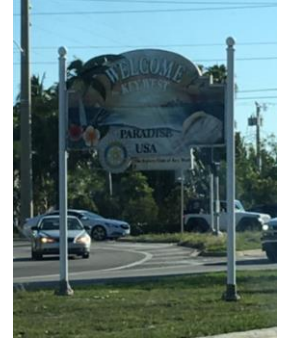
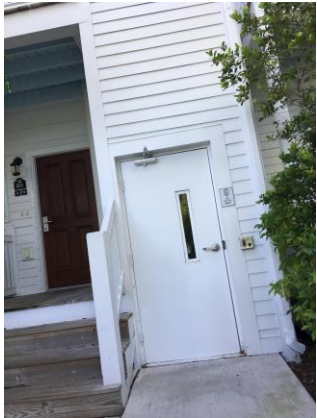


Accessible Florida Keys: A Great Getaway for Wheelchair Users!

Recently, I had the opportunity to take a quick 5-day vacation to the Florida Keys. Getting away from the office is always a challenge, especially with business booming, so we chose to visit Key West for a few days of fun in the sun. Known for its fishing community, The Florida Keys is located off the southern coast of Florida, forming the southernmost portion of the continental United States. They begin at the southeastern coast of the Florida peninsula, about 15 miles south of Miami, and extend in a gentle arc south-southwest and then westward to Key West, the westernmost and most popular of the islands. The islands lie along the Florida Straits, dividing the Atlantic Ocean to the east from the Gulf of Mexico. The southern part of Key West is just 90 miles from Cuba.



Parrot Key Resort



One of the biggest challenges on any vacation is finding wheelchair accessible lodging. Luckily, I came across Parrot Key Resort in Key West. Unlike a traditional hotel, Parrot Key's accommodations include two and three bedroom classic Key West styled villas, with multiple floors and elevator access to the main level. We were provided key access to use the private elevator that led us to the master bedroom, mini kitchen and balcony overlooking the pool and activities center of the resort. The restroom was equipped with spacious moving areas, a roll-in shower and roll-under marble sink. The bed was a bit high for easy transfers and the doorways gave just enough room to pass through, but otherwise the villa was amazing!

Another great attribute of the resort were the chair lifts easily accessible at every pool. These remote controlled lifts allow a person with a physical disability to transfer into the chair, and then easily be lowered into the pool. The best part is that the resort offered poolside waitress services, so for the first time I was able to enjoy a yummy key lime piña colada while being in the cool saltwater swimming pool. The experience: Priceless!!

Captain Mick's Wheelchair Accessible Pontoon Boat

While relaxing by the pool was divine, we decided to expand our vacation to cover fishing on a wheelchair accessible charter boat in Key Largo. This nonprofit organization is managed by Captain Mick, a 30 + year fishing captain with a passion for getting anyone and everyone out on the water. Tranquil Adventures provides Half Day

or Full Day of Fishing, Snorkeling, Sightseeing, Eco Tours, Bird watching, Restaurant or Tikki bar on the water and Beautiful Sunsets. Explore the Islands in Everglades National Park and the Coral reefs in John Pennekamp State Park with your guide Capt. Mick. The vessel is wheelchair accessible and great for families. According to their website, *“Our mission is to help you relax in Key Largo Florida. Our first priority is to provide our customers with good service and lots of fun. Our vessels are equipped with all coast guard approved safety equipment and can accommodate all different kinds of people and families.”*

We decided to go for a full day fishing trip where we saw turtles diving, a plethora of fish, and beautiful ocean for miles out. This was by far one of my favorite experiences to date and something I'd recommend to anyone interested in enjoying Florida's beautiful oceans!

Parrot Key Resort: <http://www.parrotkeyresort.com>

Tranquil Adventures: <http://www.activedisabledamericans.org>

Author: Lorinda Gonzalez resides in South Florida with her family and service dog, Remy. She was diagnosed with Spinal Muscular Atrophy at the age of three, and has used a motorized wheelchair for mobility since the age of nine. As an avid writer and reader, she has worked as a grant writer and editor since 2009. She recently participated in Bold Beauty Project where she was a model supporting the cause of showcasing women with disabilities and beautiful and sexy. Lorinda holds a Bachelor in the Arts Degree in English Writing and Rhetoric, and is currently completing a Masters of Arts Degree in Communications. She is a co-founder of NMD United, a 501c3 and on the board of multiple non-profit organizations. In her free time, Lorinda enjoys spending time with family and friends, painting, listening to music, and traveling to historical locations.

